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MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT.

To the Senate and House of Representatives
of the Confederate States of America.

Having recently received written notification which satisfied me that the President of the United States was disposed to confer informally with unofficial agents, that might be sent by me with a view to the restoration of peace, I requested the Hon. Alexander H. Stephens, the Hon. R. M. T. Hunter, and the Hon. John A. Campbell to proceed through our lines and to hold conference with Mr. Lincoln, or such persons as he might depute to represent him.

I herewith submit, for the information of Congress, the report of the eminent citizens above named, showing that the enemy refused to enter into negotiations with the Confederate States, or any one of them separately, or to give to our people any other terms or guaranties than those which a conqueror may grant, or to permit us to have peace on any other basis than unconditional submission to their rule, coupled with the acceptance of their recent legislation, including an amendment to the constitution for the emancipation of all the negro slaves, and with the right on the part of the Federal Congress, to legislate on the subject of the relations between the white and black population of each State. Such is, as I understand, the effect of the amendment to the constitution which has been adopted by the Congress of the United States.

JEFFERSON DAVIS.

February 6th, 1865.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS.

RICHMOND, VA., 5TH FEBRUARY, 1865.

To the President of the Confederate States:

SIR:—Under your letter of appointment of the 28th ult., we proceeded to seek an "informal conference" with Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, upon the subject mentioned in the letter. The conference was granted, and took place on the 3d inst., on board of a steamer anchored in Hampton Roads, where we met President Lincoln and the Hon. Mr. Seward, Secretary of State of the United States. It continued for several hours, and was both full and explicit. We learned from them that the message of President Lincoln to the Congress of the United States, in December last, explains clearly and distinctly his sentiments as to the terms, conditions and method of proceeding, by which peace can be secured to the people, and we were not informed that they would be modified or altered to obtain that end. We understood from him that no terms or proposals of any treaty or agreement looking to an ultimate settlement, would be entertained or made by him with the authorities of the Confederate States, because that would be a recognition of their existence as a separate power, which under no circumstances would be done; and for like reasons that no such terms would be entertained by him from the States separately; that no extended truce or armistice (as at present advised) would be granted or allowed, without a satisfactory assurance, in advance, of a complete restoration of the authority of the constitution and laws of the United States over all places within the States of the Confederacy. That whatever consequences may follow from the re-establishment of that authority, must be accepted. But that individuals, subject to pains and penalties under the laws of the United States, might rely upon a very liberal use of the power confided to him to remit those pains and penalties, if peace be restored.

During the conference, the proposed amendments to the constitution of the United States, adopted by Congress on the 31st ult., were brought to our notice. These amendments provide that neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except for crime, should exist within the United States, or any place within their jurisdiction, and that Congress should have power to enforce this amendment by appropriate legislation.

Of all the correspondence that preceded the conference herein mentioned and leading to the same, you have heretofore been informed.

Very respectfully, your obedient servants,

(Signed) ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS,
R. M. T. HUNTER,
J. A. CAMPBELL.

EXTRACT FROM MR. LINCOLN'S MESSAGE OF DECEMBER LAST, REFERRED TO IN THE FOREGOING REPORT.

The public purpose to re-establish and maintain the national authority is unchanged, and, as we believe, unchangeable. The manner of continuing the effort remains to choose. On careful consideration of all the evidence accessible, it seems to me that no attempt at negotiation with the insurgent leader could result in any good. He would accept of nothing short of the severance of the Union. His declarations to this effect are explicit and oft repeated. He does not attempt to deceive us. He offers us no excuse to deceive ourselves. We cannot voluntarily yield it. Between him and us the issue is distinct, simple and inflexible. It is an issue which can only be tried by war, and decided by victory. If we yield we are beaten. If the Southern people fail him he is beaten; either way it would be the victory and defeat following war. What is true, however, of him who heads the insurgent cause, is not necessarily true of those who follow. Although he cannot re-accept the Union, they can. Some of them we know already desire peace and reunion. The number of such may increase. They can at any moment have peace simply by laying down their arms and submitting to the national authority under the constitution. After so much the government could not, if it would, maintain war against them. The loyal people would not sustain or allow it. If questions should remain, we would adjust them by the peaceful means of legislation, conference, courts and votes. Operating only in constitutional and lawful channels, some certain and other possible questions are and would be beyond the executive power to adjust, as for instance, the admission of members into Congress, and whatever might require the appropriation of money. The executive power itself would be greatly diminished by the cessation of actual war. Pardons and remissions of forfeiture, however, would still be within Executive control. In what spirit and temper this control would be execised, can be fairly judged of by the past. A year ago, general pardon and amnesty, upon specified terms, were offered to all except certain designated classes, and it was at the same time made known that the excepted classes were still within contemplation of special clemency. During the year many availed themselves of the general provision, and many more would, only that the signs of bad faith in some led to such precautionary measures as rendered the practical process less easy and certain. During the same time, also, special pardons have been granted to individuals of excepted classes, and no voluntary application has been denied.

Thus practically the door has been for a full year open to all, except such as were not in condition to make free choice, that is, such as were in custody or under constraint. It is still so open to all, but the time may come, probably will come, when public duty shall

demand that it be closed, and that in lieu, more vigorous measures than heretofore shall be adopted.

In presenting the abandonment of armed resistance to the national authority on the part of the insurgents, as the only indispensable condition to ending the war on the part of the government, I retract nothing heretofore said as to slavery. I repeat the declaration made a year ago, and that while I remain in my present position, I shall not attempt to retract or modify the emancipation proclamation. Nor shall I return to slavery any person who is free by the terms of that proclamation, or by any of the acts of Congress.

If the people should, by whatever mode or means, make it an Executive duty to re-enslave such persons, another, and not I, must be their instrument to perform it.

In stating a single condition of peace, I mean simply to say that the war will cease on the part of the government, whenever it shall have ceased on the part of those who began it.

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